

**Training Differences Between Large and Small Police Departments who have Self-  
Reported Field Training Officer Programs**

**RUNNING HEAD: Training Differences**

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### **Recommended Audience**

The recommended audience for this research project includes senior police executives, police trainers, state, city and county executives and legislators. This research examines the ways in which training programs differ for large and small police departments.

### **Summary**

*These studies found a difference between the amount of training new officers in large departments receive vs. the training that officers in small departments receive. This study shows that police training is not equal for new officers between large and small departments in terms of hours of training, the location of training, the number of FTOs available per officer, and the minim time officers are held on probation. Specific recommendations are made for changes in training and for future studies of this problem, by state.*

### **Literature Review**

A major impact on the state of police training was made by the Wickersham Commission in 1931. One of the findings of the commission was that 80 percent of police agencies provide no formalized training to their recruits and that this was especially a problem in smaller cities.

The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration, formed in 1967 to study the criminal justice system in light of civil unrest, made recommendations to improve training for new recruits that included formalized classroom training and the addition of Field Training Officer programs.

The Commission for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) was the first to offer a national standard for police agencies that included training standards. In 1983 they offered 45 recommendations to standardize and improve the level of training available to officers.

Wilson and McLaren (1972) stated that training programs should provide a smooth transition between the classroom and the street. Goldstein (1977) found that police training would be improved if it found a way to realistically teach the required skill sets. Roberg (1976) found that police recruits should have at least a four-month “break-in period” following their police academies.

## **Methods**

This research project uses data collected for the National Institute of Justice’s Research report, Field Training for Police Officers: The State of the Art. For this study, a survey designed to elicit information about field training programs was sent to 588 state and local law enforcement agencies. These agencies were selected from the 3236 agencies in the National Criminal Justice Reference Service database. All agencies with over 200 officers (386 agencies) were selected because they were deemed by the survey author to be more likely than small agencies to have field training programs. Representative sampling was used to gather data about other agencies due to budget limitations.

The survey was taken between 1 January and 15 February 1986. A total of 288 agencies of the 588 surveyed (a 48.9 percent response rate) returned the questionnaire. Of the respondents, 183 agencies had Field Training Officer (FTO) programs. These 183 agencies form the basis for the original survey and provide the pool for selection for the current study.

The top twenty percent and the bottom twenty percent (n=36) of these 183 agencies in terms of size were compared for this new study, whose result can be found below. These two groups were used to extrapolate information about other large and small police agencies using a T-test on SPSS software.

### Results

N=36    0=SMALL 1=LARGE

<u>VARIABLE</u>	<u>GROUP</u>	<u>MEAN</u>	<u>STD DEV</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANCE</u>
SIZE	0	58.36	24.48	0.000
	1	2125.75	2208.13	
MINTIME (WEEKS)	0	8.69	6.21	0.019
	1	13.19	9.29	
MAXTIME (WEEKS)	0	19.06	17.18	0.307
	1	23.64	20.45	
MAX PROBATION (WEEKS)	0	55.53	14.7	0.285
	1	50.78	21.98	
HIRE 1984	0	4.89	3.86	0.000
	1	105.47	110.65	
WEIGHTED HIRE 1984	0	0.834	0.82	0.676
	1	0.934	1.17	
FAIL CLASS	0	0.11	0.3187	0.001
	1	4.42	7.45	
FAIL FTO	0	0.33	0.72	0.021
	1	2.14	4.44	
FAIL OTHER	0	0.8056	2.58	0.001
	1	6.08	8.87	
AGENCY TRAINING (HOURS)	0	41.47	101.99	0.000
	1	641.25	306.09	
REGIONAL TRAINING (HOURS)	0	285.56	265.83	0.000
	1	58.86	179.59	

<b>STATE TRAINING (HOURS)</b>	0	149.08	216.06	0.007
	1	25.75	154.5	
<b>OTHER TRAINING (HOURS)</b>	0	10.67	53.58	0.416
	1	30.97	138.36	
<b>TOTAL TRAINING (HOURS)</b>	0	486.78	137.07	0.000
	1	755.72	177.89	
<b>PATROL FTO</b>	0	5.69	4.91	0.006
	1	109	212.09	
<b>WEIGHTED PATROL</b>	0	10.86	12.07	0.057
	1	17.37	16.09	
<b>VICE FTO</b>	0	0	0	N/A
	1	0	0	
<b>WEIGHTED VICE</b>	0	0	0	N/A
	1	0	0	
<b>CRIME PREVENTION FTO</b>	0	0.0833	0.2803	0.083
	1	0	0	
<b>TACTICAL FTO</b>	0	0.056	0.2323	0.324
	1	5.56	32.99	
<b>WEIGHTED TACTICAL</b>	0	2.33	9.94	0.367
	1	17.65	100.01	
<b>OTHER FTO</b>	0	1.19	4.63	0.442
	1	5.47	32.66	
<b>WEIGHTED OTHER</b>	0	3.87	14.27	0.357
	1	44.71	262.23	
<b>INVESTIGATOR FTO</b>	0	0.75	2.05	0.035
<b>TOTAL FTO</b>	0	6	5.48	0.02
	1	122.25	285.08	
<b>WEIGHTED TRAINING FTO</b>	0	4.56	14.11	0.23
	1	425.47	2067.82	

## **Discussion**

The sampling of small departments in the original study should not weaken the results of this study in favor of the large departments. In fact, the small departments that responded to the original survey should actually represent the best of the small police departments due to their inclusion of FTO programs. Commitment to this additional level of training should show that these departments have training programs that should be considered among the best for small departments.

This study found a significant difference between the size of the departments in the large group and the small group (SIZE). These departments had significantly different sizes and should represent large and small departments accurately.

The category MINTIME represents the minimum time in weeks an officer would be in an FTO program, while MAXTIME represents the maximum number of weeks. This study found a significant difference between the minimum length of FTO programs in large and small departments but no significant difference between the maximum length of these programs. Small departments seem to have less strict requirements in terms of releasing officers from their FTO programs earlier than larger departments.

The results also indicate no significant difference between the maximum length of probationary periods (MAX PROBATION) between large and small departments. Both categories of police agencies seem to use a probationary period for new officers of about 52 weeks.

Results show there is a significant difference between the number of officers that large and small departments hired in 1984 (HIRE 1984). This should be no surprise; larger departments need to hire more officers due to the greater demand for recruits that their larger size

creates. When these means are weighted using the size of the department (WEIGHTED HIRE 1984), there turns out to be no significant difference between the two.

Significant differences were found in the three categories that measured how police candidates who didn't meet standards failed the program. Significant differences were found in the officers that failed in the classroom (FAIL CLASS), failed in the field training portion of policing (FAIL FTO) or failed in another portion of policing (FAIL OTHER). These differences shouldn't be surprising because they are not weighted using the size of the department. Without this weighting, small departments, with fewer trainees (and therefore fewer failures) will always have fewer dropouts. These numbers should be weighted.

The heart of this study is the numbers of hours of training departments send their recruits through. Significant differences were found between the hours large and small agencies committed to training at the agency (AGENCY TRAINING), regional training academies (REGIONAL TRAINING), state training academies (STATE TRAINING), and total hours of training for new officers (TOTAL TRAINING). No significant difference was found in the hours of other training (OTHER TRAINING) large and small departments give their officers. Some of these differences are justifiable based on how departments train their officers. Small departments tend to use state and regional training academies to do their training while large departments run their own academies. The large and significant difference between the total hours of training is an area for concern. If officers from small departments are receiving significantly less training, they may be significantly less prepared to perform their duties.

The number of officers working as patrol FTOs both weighted (WEIGHTED PATROL) and unweighted (PATROL FTO) is measured for both groups. There is a significant difference between the two groups when the numbers are unweighted and when they are weighted by

agency size, there is no difference. Therefore, the ratio of officers who are working as patrol FTOs is approximately the same.

None of the agencies in this study have a vice FTO, therefore there is no significant difference between these groups (WEIGHTED VICE and VICE FTO). There was no difference between the unweighted crime prevention FTO (CRIME PREVENTION FTO) and a weighted difference was not performed due to the extremely low response in this category. There was a significant difference between the number of investigator FTOs in large and small departments (FTO INVESTIGATOR) but, again, a weighted test was not performed due to the extremely low response rate. Due to this low response rate in this category, it can be assumed that a weighted test would fail to show a significant difference.

There was no significant difference between large and small departments in the number of tactical FTOs they have. Both the weighted (WEIGHTED TACTICAL) and the unweighted (TACTICAL FTO) results show no significance.

Other FTO categories not specifically covered in the original survey showed no significant difference when weighted (WEIGHTED OTHER) or unweighted (OTHER FTO). We can assume that there is no difference in the number of FTOs in this category.

The category of total FTOs shows a difference between the number of officers assigned both in a weighted and an unweighted category. The difference is significant in both the unweighted (TOTAL FTO) and the weighted categories (WEIGHTED TOTAL). This may show a difference in the priority that training and the FTO program in particular is given in small departments. With fewer resources available, fewer resources are dedicated to training in small departments.

The final category looked at is the difference between the years that departments have had an FTO program. There was no significant difference between years that large and small departments have had FTO programs. There is no measure of the quality of these FTO programs over the reported times since the data given on them is all self-reported.

### **Recommendations**

This study shows that police training is not equal for new officers between large and small departments in terms of hours of training, the location of training, the number of FTOs available per officer, and the minimum time officers are held on probation. Police executives, legislators at the state and city level and members of the executive branches of governments should be concerned about these differences. It seems that towns protected by smaller departments have new officers who have less training than officers from larger departments. Large departments, and the citizens they protect, need to worry about hiring experienced, certified officers from smaller jurisdictions who may not be trained to a standard necessary to work in the more populated area.

The first recommended step is to recreate this study using all of the departments in a given state. This would allow the lawmakers, police executives and elected executives in a state to compare the amount of training that different officers receive in the same state. This comparison would involve police departments with the same state training requirements to each other. Once this study was completed in all states, regional comparisons could be performed, comparing cities and towns of similar size to see how their training programs match-up.

The second recommended step would be to establish a minimum standard of training for a state that all police officers must meet. The training modules in this program must provide an

officer all of the training that they need to perform their duties if they are in a small town or a large city. This training must be relevant to modern policing and the quality of instruction must be uniformly high. Officers from small jurisdictions must have equivalent training to officers from larger departments.

States must develop a recurring mechanism that reviews the quality of training and its relevance. Whatever form this mechanism takes (e.g. an advisory board, an annual report by a state law enforcement agency to the legislature) it must have the ability to make the needed changes to the states training requirements.

This study seems to point to the fact that small departments do not have the same level of resources available to large departments. It may be necessary for the state to provide the funds and expertise that will allow smaller departments to train their new officers to a level consistent with that found in larger departments. Officers in smaller departments may not need the exact same courses to be effective in their duties (a patrol area of 20 square blocks in the middle of a large city requires different skills then a patrol area of 20 square miles in a rural area) but they need to be taught the same basic skills. Add on modules that help an officer adapt to their unique patrol areas are needed and should, if necessary, be funded by the state.

Finally, a minimum standard probationary period should be established throughout a state. Also, a minimal standard for a field training program should be established to help new officers adapt to the real world.

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